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TAGS: PREL TU NL BUN

SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS/EU: DUTCH THINKTANK REPORT ON TURKISH
ACCESSION

REF: A. TRAUB/EUR/USEU EMAILS OF 8/30

¶B. BRUSSELS 3624

Classified By: Daniel Russel, CDA, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: A recent report on Turkish EU accession by the Dutch Advisory Council on International Affairs (AIV), a think tank affiliated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has sparked debate on a possible timetable for opening accession talks with Turkey. The report's most controversial recommendation -- that the EU wait up to 24 months before beginning such talks -- has already been challenged by key Dutch public officials as inconsistent with earlier EU commitments. While the AIV is a respected organization whose views are taken seriously by the GONL, the report should not be seen as setting or reflecting official Dutch policy. Ultimately, the European Commission's October 6 report will be the most important factor in determining how the Dutch will handle this issue. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On August 25, the Dutch Advisory Council on International Affairs (AIV) released a controversial report on Turkish Accession. Because the AIV is an official think tank which frequently offers answers to questions put to it by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Development Cooperation and the State Secretary for European Affairs, the report generated a fair amount of publicity and speculation that its conclusions reflected likely GONL positions. The report's headline grabbing recommendation was that the EU should consider waiting up to 24 months to set a date for accession talks with Turkey to begin. However, contrary to some press reports, the AIV report does not advocate waiting a full 24 months before beginning talks; it actually says talks should "begin within 24 months, or earlier if possible." The report does argue that Turkey must "meet several specific action points based on the Copenhagen criteria," such as withdrawing reservations to the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Other conditions cited in the report are more subjective, however, such as proving that legislation has been implemented effectively.

¶3. (SBU) The AIV report notes that while Turkey has made progress in significant economic, political, and social areas, many reforms remain to be implemented, particularly at middle and local levels of Turkish government and society. The report repeats assurances from Dutch political leaders that Turkey should not be treated differently from how the ten new EU states were judged. On the other hand, the AIV argues (contradictorily) that the EU should learn from the mistakes of its recent enlargement and move cautiously, abiding by its own rules and standards. Finally, the report states Turkey's size and position present unique risks and problems, including in the economic sphere, and argues that a delay in opening talks would give Turkey's economy and economic governance structures needed time to align with those of the EU.

¶4. (SBU) In responding publicly to the report, State Secretary for European Affairs Nicolai disavowed the report,

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repeating that the Copenhagen criteria remain the only real benchmarks for determining when to open negotiations. Although he acknowledged that "loose ends" in December might justify a delay in opening accession talks, he stressed that the EU should not "play political games" to avoid taking a decision. Frans Timmermans, European Affairs spokesman for the opposition PvdA/Labor party, took direct issue with the AIV report's suggestion that the EU draw out a decision, arguing that the EU should open negotiations immediately if Turkey meets the Copenhagen criteria. Jan van Dijk, the European Affairs spokesman for Balkenende's Christian Democrat party (CDA), told the press that the GONL should wait for the European Commission's October report before taking a position, and suggested that a date for starting negotiations should be set three to four months after the Council assesses that Turkey has met the Copenhagen criteria.

¶5. (C) Manon Louwerens, secretary of the AIV who compiled the report, told Poloff on August 30 that the report has generated responses from all over the map, but no consensus has emerged. The Turkish DCM here told the DCM on August 31

that they dismiss the report as coming "just from an NGO" and have received assurances from senior Dutch officials that it did not reflect the GONL's position. Separately, Jaap Werner, head of the MFA's political directorate, told Poloffs on August 26 that he hoped the Turks would not overreact to the report, as it did not reflect the official Dutch position. He stressed that while the AIV report would certainly be read and considered within the ministry (as would input from other sources), the European Commission's October report would be the most important factor in setting Dutch policy on this issue.

COMMENT

16. (C) The AIV report, while serious and taken seriously by the Dutch government, should not be perceived as setting or reflecting official Dutch policy. As EU president, the Dutch have taken a firm position that the Copenhagen criteria provide the only standard for judging Turkey's readiness to begin accession talks. However, our reading suggests that the report reflects oft repeated concerns from the grass roots, where there is less concern about "a deal is a deal" when the issue is Turkey. The GONL will look to the European Commission's October 6 report to set the terms of the debate within the EU with regard to the European Council's decision in December.

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